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RESTORATION OF UNION.

SPEECH

OF

WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

TO

THE CITIZENS OF NEW YORK, AT COOPER INSTITUTE,

45-10
FEBRUARY 22, 1866,

ON THE

RESTORATION OF UNION.

WASHINGTON:
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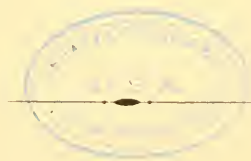
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Upon Mr. SEWARD's recognition of the applause which greeted him, the vast audience rose *en masse*, and welcomed him as men are rarely welcomed by their fellow-citizens. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, the men cheered and hurrahed with long-continued enthusiasm. After the applause had subsided, Mr. SEWARD said :

I was at Auburn in this our old and honored State of New York in October, and I spoke then what I thought would be pertinent to public affairs for a whole year. The summons of friends in the city of New York brings me back after the expiration of only three months. Their demand is, I confess, rather hard upon me, under the circumstances. Nevertheless, I obey. I am no Secessionist. I profess to understand how to obey the commands of the people of my own State without violating my allegiance to the United States.

Now, what shall I speak of or about? The call of your meeting specifies the subject. But first, let me say that I am not here as an alarmist; I am not here to say that the nation is in peril or danger—in peril if you adopt the opinions of the President; in peril if you reject them; in peril if you adopt the views of the apparent or real majority of Congress, or if you reject them. It is not in peril any

way; nor do I think the cause of liberty and human freedom, the cause of progress, melioration, or civilization, the cause of national aggrandizement, present or future, material or moral, is in danger of being long arrested, whether you adopt one set of political opinions or another. The Union—that is to say, the nation—has been rescued from all its perils. The noble ship has passed from tempests and billows within the verge of a safe harbor, and is now securely riding into her ancient moorings, without a broken spar or a leak, starboard or larboard, fore or aft. There are some small reefs yet to pass as she approaches those moorings. One pilot says that she may safely enter directly through them. The other says that she must back, and, lowering sail, take time to go around them. That is all the difference; it is merely the difference of opinion between the pilots. I should not practice my habitual charity if I did not admit that I think them both sincere and honest. But the vessel will go in safely, one way or the other. The worst that need happen will be that, by taking the wrong instead of the right passage, or even taking the right passage and avoiding the wrong one, the vessel may roll a little, and some honest, capable, and even deserving politicians, statesmen, President, or Congressmen may get washed overboard. I should be sorry for this, but if it cannot be helped, it can be borne. If I am one of the unfortunates, let no friend be concerned on that account. As honest, as good, as capable politicians, statesmen, Congressmen, and Presidents will make their appearance hereafter, faster than needed, to command the ship, as well and as wisely as any that have heretofore stalked their hour upon the deck, in the alternations of calm and tempest that always attend political navigation.

Nevertheless, although I do not think we are in a crisis, the question to-day is worthy of deliberate examination and consideration. It is always important, in going into a port or preparing for a new departure, to take accurate observations, in order to ascertain whether the ship and crew are sound and in good fastening and in good sailing condition. The subject before us is a difference of opinion that reveals itself but too clearly between the executive administration of the President and the legislative counsellors of the nation. The

President, as we all see, is a man of decided convictions; the legislative leaders, if we may judge from their resolutions, are trying to decide not to coincide with him in opinion. They have appealed to us, outsiders as we are, to pronounce between them. I will try to show you what the nature and character of the difference is.

Some of you, few or many, have been occasionally in a theatre. You may remember a play that had some popularity a few years ago, entitled "The Nervous Man and the Man of Nerve." Both of these characters were well-to-do country gentlemen. They had been friends in early life. Their friendship grew with their years. They lived in distant parts of the country. The nervous man had a hopeful son; the man of nerve had a loveable daughter. By some freak of fortune, or some more capricious god, these young people had accidentally come together at a watering-place, and there formed an attachment unknown to their parents. In the meantime the nervous man and the man of nerve had come to an agreement to marry the two young people together, under a belief that they were entirely unknown to each other. Each parent made the announcement to his child in a mysterious manner. The nervous man's son was told that he was to be married to an unknown lady with whom he was sure to fall in love at first sight, but whose name must be withheld until the day of the ceremony. The daughter of the man of nerve received a similar pleasant intimation. Each lover protested, each parent was peremptory, each lover impracticable. As a natural consequence both ran away, and, as was quite natural, both came together, and they were clandestinely married. When the nervous man heard of his son's contumacious disobedience he denounced him, disinherited him, disowned him, and declared he would never see him again. When the man of nerve heard of the flight of his daughter he immediately summoned his dependants, who sought to restore her to her father. One parent was all passion, the other was all decision. While they were comparing their mutual and common grief and disappointment, the married lovers came trembling into the angry presence, and kneeling down, asked forgiveness and parental blessings upon what was now irrevocable. What was the

parents' surprise to find that the runaway match was just precisely the one they had planned, and the supposed failure of which had so deeply excited them. The man of nerve acquitted himself with becoming resignation, and, since it had all ended right, he extended to the lovers the boon they begged. The nervous man refused altogether to be comforted, propitiated, or even soothed. He refused and declared that he would persist forever in refusing to receive back again the son who had been so disobedient. When his outburst of passion had somewhat subsided, the man of nerve said: "Well, now, old friend, why won't you forgive him? Have you not got the matter all your own way after all?" "Why, yes," replied the nervous man, "I have got it all my own way." "Then, why will you not forgive him?" said the man of nerve. "Why, damn it, I haven't had my own way of having it." This, I think, is the difference between the President, who is a man of nerve, in the Executive chair at Washington, and the nervous men who are in the House of Representatives. Both have got the Union restored as they originally planned it should be. They have got it restored, not with slavery, but without it; not with secession, flagrant or latent, but without it; not with compensation for emancipation, but without it; not with compromise, but without; not with disloyal States, or representatives, but with loyal States and representatives; not with rebel debts, but without them; not with exemption from our own debts for suppressing the rebellion, but with equal liabilities upon the rebels and the loyal men; not with freedmen and refugees abandoned to suffering and persecution, but with the freedmen employed in productive, self-sustaining industry, with refugees under the protection of law and order. The man of nerve sees that it has come out right at last, and he accepts the situation. He does not forget that in this troublesome world of ours, the most to be secured by anybody is to have things come out right. Nobody can ever expect to have them brought out altogether in his own way. The nervous men, on the other hand, hesitate, delay, debate, and agonize—not because it has not come out right, but because they have not

individually had their own way in bringing it to that happy termination.

I have said that I apprehend no serious difficulty or calamity. This confidence arises from the conviction which I entertain that there never was and never can be any successful process for the restoration of union and harmony among the States, except the one with which the President has avowed himself satisfied. Grant it that the rebellion is dispersed, ended, and exhausted, dead even at the root, then it follows necessarily that the States sooner or later must be organized loyal men in accordance with the change in our fundamental law, and that, being so organized, they should come by loyal representatives and resume their places in the family circle which, in a fit of caprice and passion, they rebelliously vacated. All the rebel States but Texas have done just that thing, and Texas is doing the same thing just now as fast as possible. The President is in harmony with all the States that were in rebellion. Every executive department and the judicial department are in operation, or are rapidly resuming the exercise of their functions. Loyal representatives, more or less, from all these States—men whose loyalty may be tried by any constitutional or legislative test which will apply even to the representatives of the States which have been loyal throughout—are now standing at the doors of Congress, and have been standing there for three months past, asking to be admitted to seats which disloyal representatives, in violence of the rights and duties of the States, as well as of the sovereignty of the Union, had recklessly abandoned. These representatives, after a lapse of three months, yet remain waiting outside the chambers, while Congress passes law after law, imposes burden after burden, and duty after duty upon the States which, against their earnestly expressed desires, are left without representation. So far as I can judge of human probabilities, I feel sure that the loyal men from the now loyal States will, sooner or later, at this session or at some other, by this Congress or by some other, be received into the Legislature of the nation. When this shall have been done, the process of restoration will be complete; for that is all that now remains to be done.

If, in this view of the subject, my judgment is at fault, then some of those who now uphold the opposite one can show some other process of restoration which is practicable, and which can be and will be adopted, and when it is likely to be adopted. Does any person pretend to know such a plan? Other plans, indeed, have been mentioned. They were projected during Mr. Lincoln's administration; they have been projected since. Briefly described, these plans have been such as this: that Congress, with the President concurring, should create what are called Territorial Governments in the eleven States which were once in rebellion, and that the President should administer the government there for an indefinite period by military force, and that after long purgation they should be admitted into the Union by Congressional enactment. This proceeding was rejected by Mr. Lincoln, as it is rejected by the President. If ever it may have been practicable it is now altogether too late. If the President could be induced to concur in so mad a measure at this date, it would be impossible to execute it. Say what you will or what you may, the States are already organized, in perfect harmony with our amended National Constitution, and are in earnest co-operation with the Federal Government. It would require an imperial will, an imperial person, and imperial powers greater than the Emperor of France possesses, to reduce any one of these States, with the consent of all the other States, into what you term a territorial condition. Maximilian's task, though it engages two Emperors and two imperial organizations, with their forces, it is thought not the most wise and hopeful political enterprise of the day. On the other hand we have no Emperor, but only a stern, uncompromising, radical Republican, a Democrat, call him what you will, for President, who refuses in every way to be a party to any imperial transactions, and who would hand them back to Congress if they were to offer him the men and money to prosecute such imperial enterprises. Suppose that he could give place to another President, whether by election, or even assassination, where will you find in the United States a man who would want to be elected to that high place to plunge this country into a civil war for a political chimera? If there be such a one,

what chance is there that he would be elected for such a purpose? That scheme, then, is at an end, and it is not now even seriously mentioned. Is there any other plan? Congress has a Reconstruction Committee, as it is called, composed of fifteen members, who have have stopped the wheels of legislation three months to enable them to submit a process or plan different from that which is now on the eve of a happy consummation. And what have they given us? One proposed amendment to the Constitution, to compel the excluded States to equalize suffrage upon the penalty of an abridgment of representation. I do not discuss its merits. Either the amendment will or will not be adopted. The expectation is, that it will fail even in Congress. In any case it implies a full restoration of the Southern States. It is, therefore, no plan or process of reconstruction at all. The Committee prove this to be the true character of the proceeding, because they fall back upon a process not of restoration, but of obstruction. The resolution which they submitted Tuesday last, and which has passed the House of Representatives, directly declares that loyal representatives shall not be admitted from loyal States until Congress shall pass a law for that purpose—which law, it would seem that every member who votes for it must know, cannot be enacted without the President's approval, which cannot be consistently given in view of the opinions that he is known to entertain. This concurrent resolution, then, is not a plan for reconstruction, but a plan for indefinite postponement and delay by the concurrent action of the Houses of Congress.

I know that the scriptural instruction is not always accepted as an infallible guide of faith in these latter days. I do not, therefore, ask you whether the United States Government ought not now to slay the fatted calf and invite our prodigal brethren to so luxurious a feast; but I do venture to say that when this nation became disorganized five years ago by flagrant secession and rebellion, we did determine to humble the rebels and bring them back again to their constitutional seat at the family table. I know that we have humbled them, and have brought them back with humiliation and repentance suing for restoration. I know that when Congress was con-

vened, and when the last elections were held, which gave utterance to the popular voice, it was their expectation that without unnecessary delay that table would be set, and that all the members of the family, however prodigal they had been, would be received at the board.

There being, then, no further plan of restoration, what are the chances of carrying out the system of obstruction to which I have referred? It is as impracticable in its character as I think it is vicious. If I have read the history of this country correctly, it has settled these three things: First—No State can keep itself out of the Union or keep itself in a territorial condition under the Union. In the very beginning four States refused to enter; with wry faces they all came in afterward—making the whole number of States thirteen instead of the nine first consenting. All the region east of the Mississippi rushed rapidly through a brief territorial pupillage into the Union. We bought provinces from Spain, from France, from Mexico. From the Mississippi to the Pacific they have rushed or are rushing with railroad speed, after a brief territorial existence, as States into the Union. If it were possible, we might acquire still more provinces, North or South. You cannot easily go further West. Every province that there might be gained, whether white or black, old or young, alien or native born, would be immediately rushing, as with railroad speed, as States into the Union. Another thing which our national history teaches is, that the States which are in the Union cannot be taken or kept out of its limits; and that is the great lesson of the rebellion. The third thing which this eventful war teaches us is, that the States which are in the Union cannot keep any States that are outside from coming in. Congress is habitually inclined to this experiment. It hesitated about Michigan and Missouri; it reeled and staggered before Texas and California; and it convulsed the nation in resisting Kansas; yet they are all in the Union, all now loyal, and most of them cheerful and happy. How many Committees of Conference did we have, how many Joint Committees did we not have, on this momentous question? How many Joint Resolutions, denying that Congress ever would consent to the

admission of such unwelcome intruders? How many compromises, securing guarantees for freedom, securing guarantees for slavery, were broken and scattered, when one after the other these States came in, as if by a headlong thrust and hurled by an Almighty Providence, who was determined that the people of this Continent shall be not many discordant nations, but one united and harmonious nation.

I entered Congress in 1849, when the Joint Committee of Fifteen was skillfully, and it is but just to say, honestly framed to obstruct the admission of California until the majority of the nation should compromise and silence forever the debate upon slavery. The Committee succeeded in excluding California for a period of eight months and no longer, and eventually obtained, in broken fragments, the compromise which it sought. That compromise was by its terms to be perpetual. The compromise of 1850 lingered, however, just four years and then perished, giving place to the incipient and now happily consummated adjustment of the slavery question, by the complete and universal abrogation of that institution. I left Congress in 1861, when Committees and Conventions clustered in and around the Capitol, demanding stipulations (which Congress refused) that fetters should be put upon New Mexico, Nevada, and Colorado. You can never keep States out of this Union, never, no never! If we do not like them, we may, in the words of the old proverb, "lump them." The present distrusts of future States or of existing States have no substantial ground. They are begotten of miserable perishing fears and factions. California was suspected of secret or ultimate complicity with slavery. All the men in the Union knew the hard feelings her people entertained toward us Free-soilers, who were their most earnest advocates. We gave her ten years of pro-slavery, Democratic rule. The ten years are now up, and she is calm, perhaps distrustful of some of us yet, because we are willing to admit the States that have sinned and repented as she did. If ever this thing of keeping out States by Joint Resolution of Congress could have had any chance of permanent success, that time has passed away. No State has ever been hindered in coming into the Union

except upon questions growing out of the system of African bondage. But African bondage has now gone to the dogs, and they have made a sure finish of it. Not even enough of its shriveled skin or disjointed limbs remains to sharpen the cupidity of the race that were once called slaveholders, or of that other race which was known to the country as "doughfaces." No State, therefore, will ever, hereafter, be hindered or delayed in coming back into the Union upon the ground of slavery.

You may think that the irresistible tendency to Union which I have described may have something alarming in it. This would be a grave error. I think no such thing. The people in any Territory want to be a State, because it is a pleasant thing and a good thing to have the municipal powers and faculties which belong to a State within the American Union, and to provide by its own laws for the maintenance and security of life, liberty, and property. A territory wants to be a State and a member of the Federal Union, because it is a pleasant thing and a good thing to have its protection against foreign enemies, and to possess the privileges and immunities guaranteed to a State by the national Constitution. I therefore would not consent to hold a State in a territorial condition, or to deny it the advantages of fellowship in the Union a day longer than I should be compelled. Nor do I see anything calculated to excite alarm, anything transcending the political ability of our statesmen, in the present situation of the freedmen. In the beginning, practically, every State in the Union had slavery. We abolished it in several States without disorder or civil commotion, until slavery raised itself in rebellion against the Government of the Union. When it took that attitude, we abolished it out and out, through and through, completely and effectually forever. This is what the American people have had the sagacity and the courage to do in a period of ninety years. These American people are a great deal better and a great deal wiser to-day than they were ninety years ago. Those of the generation that is now crowding us; will be a great deal wiser and a great deal better than we who are on the stage to-day. Do I think, therefore, that we shall lack the wisdom or the virtue to go right on

and continue the work of melioration and progress, and perfect in due time the deliverance of labor from restrictions, and the annihilation of caste and class. We have accomplished what we have done, however, not with an imperial government—not with a pro-consular or territorial system. We have done it in States, by States and through States, free, equal, untrammelled, and presided over by a Federal, restricted Government, which will continue to the end the constitutional progress with which we so wisely began. They are settling the whole case of the African in the West Indies just as we are, and it will be done with the same results and the same beneficent effects.

I have not given prominence in these remarks to the conflict of opinion between the President and Congress in reference to the Bureau for the relief of Freedmen and Refugees. That conflict is, in its consequences, comparatively unimportant, and would excite little interest and produce little division if it stood alone. It is because it has become the occasion for revealing the difference that I have already described that it has attained the importance which seems to surround it. Both the President and Congress agree that, during the brief transition which the country is making from civil war to internal peace, the freedmen and refugees ought not to be abandoned by the nation to persecution and suffering. It was for this transition period that the Bureau of Freedmen was created by Congress, and was kept and is still kept in effective operation. Both the President and Congress, on the other hand, agree that when that transition period shall have been fully passed, and the harmonious relations between the States and the Union fully restored, that Bureau would be not only unnecessary but unconstitutional, demoralizing and dangerous, and therefore it should cease to exist.

The President thinks that the transition stage has nearly passed, and that the original provision for the Bureau is all that is necessary to secure the end in view, while the bill submitted by Congress seems to him to give it indefinite extension in time of peace and restoration. He vetoed it for that reason. He declines to accept, as unnecessary and uncalled for, the thousand or ten thousand agents, the

increased powers and the augmented treasure which Congress insists on placing in his hands. Congress, on the other hand, thinks that the Freedmen's Bureau is not adequate, and that more patronage, more money, and more power would, like Thompson's doorplate, purchased at auction by Mrs. Toodles, be a good thing to have in a house. I agree with the President in the hope that the extraordinary provision which the bill makes will not be necessary, but that the whole question may be simplified by a simple reference to the existing law. The law of March 3, 1865, which created the Freedmen's Bureau, provides that it shall continue in force during the war of rebellion and one full year thereafter. When does that *year* expire? In the President's judgment, as I understand the matter, the war of the rebellion has been coming and is still coming to an end, but is not yet fully closed. It is on this ground that he maintains an army, continues the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, and exercises martial law, when these things are found to be necessary in rebel States. The existence of the rebellion was legally announced by Executive proclamation in 1861. The end of the rebellion ought to be, and may be expected to be, announced by competent declaration of the President and of Congress, or of both. For all practical purposes, the rebellion will, in law, come to an end if the President or Congress, one or both, officially announces its termination. Now, suppose this announcement to be made by the President and by Congress, or by either of them, to-morrow. In that case, the Freedmen's Bureau is continued by virtue of the limitation prescribed in the Act of March 3, 1865, one year after such proclamation shall have been made. Thus the Freedmen's Bureau would continue, by the original limitation, until the 22d day of February, 1867—a very proper day on which to bring it to an end. If Congress should then find it necessary to prolong its existence, Congress can at once take the necessary steps, for it will at that date have been in session nearly three months. Ought the President of the United States to be denounced in the House of his enemies—much more ought he to be denounced in the House of his friends, for refusing, in the absence of any necessity, to occupy or retain, and to

exercise powers greater than those which are exercised by any imperial magistrate in the world? Judge ye! I trust that this fault of declining imperial powers, too hastily tendered by a too confiding Congress, may be forgiven by a generous people. It will be a sad hour for the Republic when the refusal of unnecessary powers, treasure, and patronage by the President shall be held to be a crime. When it shall be so considered, the time will have arrived for setting up at the White House an imperial throne, and surrounding the Executive with imperial legions.



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